



# City of New Bedford

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## Update on the City's Efforts on Casino Gaming

**Mayor Jon Mitchell**

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In a December essay that appeared in *The Standard-Times* I advocated for a cautious, deliberate approach to the issue of casino gaming in New Bedford. I made it clear that my door would be open to any casino developer or operator whose project would mesh well with the future we all want for our City.

Since then my Administration has been working to assess and plan for the possibility of a casino that makes New Bedford better off in the long run. It is vitally important for New Bedford to maximize its opportunity to conduct a thoughtful, full assessment of various proposals--and do so mindful of developments happening in other regions and how these events may impact the competitive environment in our own region.

We have therefore asked the Massachusetts Gaming Commission to extend the deadline by which casino operators who want to locate their project in Southeastern Massachusetts may apply for a gaming license. I want to update the public on the range of our assessment and planning efforts to date, so they are fully informed about the rationale for taking this step.

New Bedford remains the #1 fishing port in the nation, we have positioned ourselves as the center of the emerging American offshore wind industry, and we continue to see the emergence of job growth in the Upper Harbor and an ever more vibrant downtown. So as we have studied the potential impacts and opportunities for a resort casino, we have looked for solutions that help ensure the introduction of a casino enhances this momentum and does not slow or undermine it.

Our goal remains the same as it has always been, to put New Bedford in the best possible position as we explore this potential economic development opportunity. Residents should know that, consistent with my previous public statements, we are proceeding in a very deliberate way to maximize our chances of success. In recent weeks we have been hard at work:

First, we have welcomed the input of the community and listened to the range of opinions on the matter of casino gaming. That knowledge, shared through many, often lengthy conversations, has helped inform our judgments and shaped our priorities.

Second, several weeks ago the City sought out expert independent legal counsel and urban planners to give us advice in a complex and dynamic policy area, as provided for under the state's Gaming Act.

Third, we have sought out firsthand knowledge by visiting Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to understand better how casino gaming is functioning in a mid-size American city often compared with New Bedford.

Fourth, we have assembled a city-wide working group from multiple departments, lead by the economic development experts at the New Bedford Economic Development Council. Over the past few months, the City's working group has met with potential developers, including KG Urban Enterprises—the developers who have formally applied to the state Gaming Commission to construct a resort casino at the NSTAR site in the Designated Port Area of our harbor.

As part of that dialogue, the City team presented to KG a comprehensive series of questions and received a robust response. The City remains committed to that exchange of information and constructive engagement continuing.

Our vision of what works best for New Bedford is clearer today as a result of the working group's assessment exercise. We have: 1) A much better understanding of both the strengths and limitations of the NSTAR location; and 2) A much better understanding of what the City's top priorities and overall approach should be toward casino development.

In particular, we have learned that for a resort style casino to work best in New Bedford we need to find a way for it to positively affect our existing and future maritime industries, protect our culture and brand identity, create jobs for New Bedford residents, and generally insure that local businesses and residents share in its economic success. The project with the best chance for success is a project that therefore includes the following elements:

- The project should be located on a site that does not negatively impact the growth of our fishing industry, cargo industry, offshore wind deployment and manufacturing, and should preferably lie outside our protected Designated Port Area while understanding that this consideration need not be an absolute condition.
- The project should not detract from the City's heritage and brand, and fit well with our cultural landscape. We have built a strong maritime identity and new development must be executed in a way that enforces that positive image of New Bedford. That means, among other things, a project needs to be executed at a scale that does not physically dominate the City's landscape.
- The project should be easily accessible by highway and not cause concerns for pedestrians or local vehicles.
- Any waterfront project should ideally offer major recreational boating opportunities to promote New Bedford as a destination recreation port, without interfering with current uses in key land-based and marine industries.
- It should ideally take advantage of opportunities for the adaptive re-use of historic or existing structures at some level of integration with new facilities.
- A convention center should be included in the development to advance the City's tourism and marketing goals and present New Bedford to a broader audience beyond gaming.

- The project should strongly complement the City's existing economic development priorities by including or supporting 'overflow' hotel development in the downtown proper to increase population density in the urban core, promoting connections to the downtown and north end, creating high-quality public access to the waterfront, and acting as a catalyst for additional non-gaming investment and job creation.
- The project must supply significant resources that allow the City to invest in its future.

In short, the way forward is much clearer: A project proposal that is crafted in cooperation with the City to reflect the above principles deserves serious consideration as a candidate for execution of a host community agreement. The project most deserving of consideration will be that which is best aligned with our approach to development as outlined. The City stands ready to continue its engagement with all potential developers and operators around proposals that best conform to our development approach.